

## Contributions

### THE FOOLISHNESS OF WISDOM

J. L. GILLIN

In the June number of the *Biblical World*, Dean A. Walker shows the foolishness into which the wisdom of the world may lead men. His subject is "Idealism and Opportunism in Jesus' Teaching." He says "more and more as love becomes effective may law be laid aside. But in the transition from one agency to the other no part of society can safely go ahead of the rest in the practice of non-resistance. Society like an army on the march in the presence of the enemy, must keep well together, and the new base of operations must be well secured before the old is abandoned. Law cannot be suspended till love is firmly in control. The teaching has a wide range of practical applications. The conditions of life under which men find themselves constitute a law of their being. War is a survival of primitive conditions of fear and distrust and tribal narrowness of view. But can we abolish war today? Not one jot or one tittle of it till we can effectually apply some other force to do war's work. But wherever the same ends can be reached by diplomacy, courtesy, fair play, and the application of the golden rule, war is criminal and its authors are to be condemned. Competition is the modern law of business, and the honest business man finds himself under such pressure of competition as make sharp practices, not to say dishonesty, seem essential to success. Conscientious scruples are a handicap to him in the race. The few unscrupulous ones set the pace, and the many honest ones feel compelled against their will to meet sharp practices on their own ground. Young men beginning business see much to make them question whether honesty is still the best policy, as it used to be. The honest majority pass laws under cover of which to checkmate the more unscrupulous, but with only partial success. What shall the honest man do? For the man of mere average ability to try to stand alone in living up to his ideals would be to commit mercantile suicide. He might as well give up his business at once, but to do so is to fail to meet his obligations to those dependent on him.

To such a one coming to Jesus to learn what he ought to do Jesus would say, if he saw the man was lacking in ideals: Go, sell out your business, give the proceeds to the poor, and come follow me. But if he saw the man already given in heart to the ideal, he would probably give him this common sense advice: Competition as the present law of business has a purpose of great importance to fulfill in human society. Not one jot or tittle of this competition may you relax till that purpose is fulfilled. Should you in defiance of this law try to put in practice at once the extreme ideals of honesty, you will not merely be called least in the kingdom of business, you will actually

find yourself to be out of it altogether. Yet you do well to lean hard toward your ideals. Is there not, then, a small margin of your present success, won by sharp practices, that you could safely sacrifice without losing your footing in business? By dealing a little more leniently with your competitors, when you have the advantage of them, you can help to create a condition in which the honest among them can more easily effect their ideals, you will relieve some of the pressure that the unscrupulous allege as their excuse, and by so much you will help to refute those who say that a man cannot succeed in business without cheating. The hope of salvation from sin for the business world lies, not in the honest man's going out of business, but in his remaining in it and, while yet under the law of its conditions, devoting to God, in the old Hebrew sense of *giving up to destruction* for God's sake, that margin of material success that comes by sharp practices over and above what is absolutely necessary for survival. In this margin, so consecrated to God, lies the possibility of the accumulation by small increments of the moral forces that shall in time fulfill the purpose of the present law of competition. In this margin lies the possibility of a visible difference, too seldom realized today, between the man of the world and the professed disciple of Christ."

Two things can be replied to this sophistry: (1.) We nowhere find Jesus Christ or his apostles giving any such advice to anyone as this writer imagines Christ would give to the business man who has high ideals. (2.) If such a principle had governed the early disciples of Christ, how changed would be the history of the church! Instead of telling the disciples to abstain from idolatry, even every appearance of evil, the apostles ought to have written to these Christians just converted from heathenism, that they should not worship idols any more than was necessary to retain the good will of their heathen friends and neighbors and thus save their business and social standing, that they should not condemn the worship of idols and urge people to worship the only true God except in a way and so far as would not bring upon them the persecution of idolaters. If such had been the principle upon which the apostles and early disciples had acted, whence would have come the martyrs. Not a single martyr's name would have glorified the pages of history. The gospel would not have been preached everywhere with power and demonstration of the spirit. If the principle which our friend Walker urges is correct the whole history of the Apostolic church was a serious and useless blunder, the martyrs were fools and the apostles not fit to guide the hopes and actions of men. Such a false gospel would mean today the practical abandonment of Christ's principles. There must always be leaders in the ethical thought of humanity and Christ and his disciples are such leaders. Woe to the church, when, instead of blazing the way thru the

wilderness of this world's morals, she stands back and says "We must go no faster than the world goes." The world has come thus far in the morals of Christ, only because brave souls have stood close to Christ and have called out to a world far behind, "You are behind your possibilities; come up to Christ."

The only way to make the world Christian every whit is like Christ "to testify that the works thereof are evil," and that Christ's way is better,—to testify this by life and word. And such a testimony always means martyrdom. But it means success also. For the world has always crowned after many days the prophets whom it formerly slew, and accepts the doctrines for which it slew them. No sir, the thing for the Christian business man to do is to obey Christ and let God care for results. Of the preacher, it is the duty, to preach the plain gospel, no matter how far from that may be the ideals of men and no matter what the cost to him personally and God will look out for results. The thing for the Christian to do is to practice Christ's plain teachings on non-resistance and every thing else whether another man on the whole earth does so or not.

Christ's teachings do not wait on the consensus of opinion; their appeal is to the individual conscience. Only as the individual is true to them will the world come to accept them.

### METHODS IN CHURCH WORK

C. H. WETHERBE

Many a pastor would do well to hurry out of the ruts in which he has been doing work for his church and get into new methods of bringing them to the church and to Christ. But a large number of pastors are so ultra-conservative that they could not be persuaded to leave the old beaten track which they have long been running in, even if they knew that they and the church would gain much by the change, because they would fear being called sensational and heterodox. Now, while I heartily believe in one being fundamentally conservative and thoroughly Scriptural, yet I also believe that a pastor needs to change his methods of work, when he sees a better one than he has been following.

Dr. Conwell of Philadelphia, the pastor of a great "institutional church," in a recent address before ministerial students, said: "I know of a village pastor who started a girls' millinery class in his basement, and then other classes. He got all the preachers and churches angry with him because he drew away all their people. Two of the churches shut up and quit, as they ought to have done a long time ago, and this man controls the religious interests and destiny of the county. I know many men who have gotten their start in institutional classes, who have gone on to great success in life, and who are bound by hooks of steel to the church which inspired and instructed them and led them